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TIMON OF ATHENS AND THE IRREGULARITIES
IN THE FIRST FOLIO.

TIMON OF ATHENS presents an unsolved problem in authorship. The play, it is generally agreed, was not written by Shakespeare alone ; fully half seems to be the work of an inferior hand. In attempting to solve the problem scholars have made much of two extraneous facts: (1) that although the play (Shakespeare's part, at least) was written as early as 1606-7, it was nowhere mentioned until the publishers of the First Folio entered it upon the Stationers' Registers, November 8, 1623, as one of the plays "not formerly entred to other men;" (2) that when the play did appear in the Folio, it was accompanied by curious, and apparently significant, irregularities in the printing. The latter fact, in particular, has given rise to much speculation.

If the typographical irregularities of the Folio *Timon* have any bearing on the question of authorship, they are important. If they do not, they are—like all things connected with Shakespeare—interesting. In any case it is well for us to know exactly what these irregularities are, and how they came about. Mr. Fleay's generally accepted interpretation of the case¹ is materially incorrect. Mr. Lee's interpretation,² although it avoids some of the grosser blunders of Mr. Fleay, is still unsatisfactory. I shall try to present the case as clearly as possible, and draw from the facts the simplest explanation. In order to follow the reasoning, the reader should have at hand a facsimile of the First Folio.

At the outset we must understand the mechanical make-up of the book. Three folios were combined by the printers into a quire of six leaves. The first leaf of each folio bore on its

¹ *New Shak. Soc. Trans.*, 1874, pp. 136-7.

² Facsimile of the First Folio, 1902.

recto, or front, a signature, the sequence being a , a_2 , a_3 . Folio a_2 was placed within folio a , and folio a_3 within folio a_2 . Thus a normal quire consisted of six sheets, each of the first three having a signature on the front.

Each folio-sheet contained a single water-mark. When the sheet was folded, this water-mark came in the center of one of the pages. Evidently, if the water-mark came on the page bearing the signature, it could not appear on the other page of that folio, and *vice versa*.¹ Thus, by consulting enough copies of the First Folio we may determine whether a certain page is a single sheet, or a half of a folio.

Beginning now with that division of the book entitled Tragedies, we find that the pagination, the signatures, and the quires run smoothly through *Coriolanus*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Romeo and Juliet* as far as page 73. At this point the regular arrangement was thrown into confusion. Page 73 should begin a new quire (gg , gg_2 , gg_3) consisting of the remaining five pages of *Romeo and Juliet* and the first seven pages of the following play. For some reason, however, the printing of this following play was interrupted. A jump in pagination to 109, and in signatures to kk was made, and the printing was then resumed with *Julius Cæsar* and was continued without interruption to the end of the book.

What play caused the printers this trouble? The answer is unmistakable. The editors originally intended to follow *Romeo and Juliet* with *Troilus and Cressida*. If we examine *Troilus and Cressida* as it appears in the First Folio, we find that it is placed between the Histories and the Tragedies, and that its name is omitted entirely from the "Catalogue" at the front of the book. The prologue of the play occupies the first page; the next three pages bear the title *The Tragedy of Troilus and Cressida*; and the third and fourth pages retain the pagination 79, 80. Now if we place *Troilus and Cressida* after *Romeo*

¹The four copies in the British Museum (all of which I have examined) are sufficient to decide every case in question.

and *Juliet*, allowing the last page of *Romeo and Juliet* to occupy the page over which the prologue is spread, we find that the pagination of the third and fourth pages would have been 79, 80, and that the heading of the pages would originally have been "Tragedy." On no other hypothesis can we account for these curious facts than that originally the play was intended to follow *Romeo and Juliet*.

This is conclusively proved by the *Sheldon Folio*, thus described by Mr. Lee:¹ "A peculiar feature is a mutilated cancelled leaf containing concluding lines of 'Romeo and Juliet' on front and opening lines of 'Troylus' at back; this leaf, half of which has been torn away, precedes a normal leaf afterwards inserted, which supplies prologue of 'Troylus' in the front and opening page of that play at the back;" and by the *Morgan Folio*: "The leaf containing prologue and first page of 'Troylus' is from a smaller original. A cancelled leaf at beginning of Tragedies section, forming an original part of the copy, contains the last lines of 'Romeo and Juliet' on its obverse page (numbered 77 with a signature which is stated to read gg₃)² and the opening lines of 'Troylus' on the reverse page. The sigs. of 'Troylus' differ from those in other copies."³ We may take it as proved, therefore, that *Troylus and Cressida* originally followed *Romeo and Juliet*.

In the final form of the book, however, the space thus originally intended for *Troylus and Cressida* is occupied by *Timon of Athens*. *Troylus and Cressida*, as I have stated, appears by itself between the History section and the Tragedy section. This modification of the original plan gave rise to all the irregularities.

For the sake of convenience, I have classified as follows the facts involved in the case.

¹ Facsimile of the First Folio.

² Should be gg₃?

³ Facsimile of the First Folio. See also Mr. Lee's *A Life of William Shakespeare*, pp. 309-10.

I. *R. and J.* leaf 71–72. End of regular quire ff.

II. *R. and J.* leaf 73–74. A single, inserted leaf. Bears on recto the sig. gg.

III. *R. and J.* leaf 75–76. A single, inserted leaf. Bears on recto the sig. gg.

IV. Leaf containing opening page of *R. and J.* Appears in two forms :

a. In the Morgan and Sheldon folios a superfluous single leaf, bearing the sig. gg.¹ Has on the recto the closing page of *R. and J.* numbered 77 ; and on the verso the opening page of *T. and C.* numbered 78.

b. Usual folio form. Not a single inserted leaf, but the first of a new normal quire, with sig. gg. Has the incorrect pagination 79, 80. On the recto the closing page of *R. and J.* in a new setting of type ; on the verso, the opening page of *T. of A.*

V. Leaf containing opening page of *T. and C.* Appears in two forms :

a. See superfluous leaf described above, IV, *a.*

b. Usual folio form. A single inserted leaf. On the recto, in place of the closing page of *R. and J.*, has a prologue, set in large type, and sprawled so as to fill the whole page. No pagination ; no signature. On the verso, the opening page of *T. and C.* in a different setting of type from (*a*), and a different ornamental headpiece. No pagination.

VI. Second leaf of *T. and C.* A single, inserted leaf. Has the pagination 79, 80. Has the headline “The *Tragedie* of *Troylus* and *Cressida*.”

VII. Rest of *T. and C.* Arranged in normal quire structure, with signatures ¶, ¶₂, ¶₃ ; ¶¶, ¶¶₂, ¶¶₃ ; ¶¶¶. The headline simply “*Troylus* and *Cressida*.”

My interpretation of these facts is this. When the printers completed quire ff, they began with page 73 a new quire gg.

¹ Mr. Lee does not state the signature of this leaf in the Sheldon Folio, “half of which has been torn away.” Of the sheet in the Morgan Folio, he says that the signature “is stated to read gg₅.” This is obviously, however, gg₃.

Not anticipating any trouble, they gave to page 73 the regular signature gg, to page 75, gg₂, and to page 77, gg₃. On page 78 they began *Troilus and Cressida*. Pages 79 and 80 of *Troilus and Cressida* were set up and printed off. At this point came some hitch in the printing of *Troilus and Cressida*. The printers, however, seems to have expected ultimately to continue with the play. Therefore they shrewdly calculated the length of *Troilus and Cressida*, and jumping quires hh and ii, began the next play, *Julius Cæsar*, on page 109, with the signature kk.¹ From this point to the end of the book the printing moved smoothly.

Then it became imperative to fill the gap, pp. 77–109, left for *Troilus and Cressida*. Evidently there was still a hitch in the printing of that play. What this was we do not know. It could hardly have been lack of copy, for the quarto edition of 1609 was at their command. It seems more probable that the editors of the Folio were having trouble over the copyright.² Anyhow, it was decided to fill the space with *Timon of Athens*.

When the printers came to fill the gap, they found on their hands the incomplete quire, gg, already described. This contained pages 73, 74, 75, 76, and 77 of *Romeo and Juliet*; pages 78, 79, and 80 of *Troilus and Cressida*; and two blank leaves (the second halves of folios gg and gg₂).

The printers saw that they could use pp. 73–74, and 75–76 by tearing off the blank pages attached to each. This accounts for II and III.

Evidently the inner folio, gg₃, containing the concluding page of *Romeo and Juliet* and the three opening pages of *Troilus and Cressida*, was worthless. Hence at this point the printers began their new quire. Carelessly overlooking the signatures on the two single leaves, and referring back to the preceding quire (ff), they began the new quire with the signature gg. This

¹ The signature jj was not used.

² The copyright was owned by rival printers, Richard Bonian and Henry Walley.

accounts for the confusion of the gg signatures, and for the fact that the last page of *Romeo and Juliet* was set up again with many typographical changes, including the error in pagination of 79 for 77, and the change of gg₃ to gg. (See IV, *b*.)

Timon of Athens lacked ten pages of filling the gap. It did not reach quire ii at all and lacked one sheet of filling quire hh. The awkwardness of a blank leaf was avoided by spreading over one side "The Actors Names;" the verso was left blank. At a later date, perhaps even after the "Catalogue" had been struck off, the hitch in the printing of *Troylus and Cressida* was removed; at least, the editors ordered the printing of the play. The printers had on hand the single folio gg₃, containing the last lines of *Romeo and Juliet* (page 77), and the three opening pages (78, 79, 80) of *Troylus and Cressida*. The first leaf, evidently, was worthless, on account of the presence of the closing lines of *Romeo and Juliet* on the recto. The printers, therefore, tore the folio into two leaves. In the place of the first a new leaf was printed,¹ on the recto of which was sprawled in large type "The Prologue," not contained in the original quarto, nor included when the play occupied the first position after *Romeo and Juliet*. On the verso of this leaf, of course, was placed the opening page of *Troylus and Cressida*. This accounts for the fact that the first two leaves of the play are single inserted leaves and not a folio, or a part of a quire; for the existence of the prologue, and for its occupying a whole page; for the new type-setting of page two, with a different headpiece, and without any pagination; and lastly for the presence on pages three and four of the pagination 79, 80, and for the headlines "The *Tragedie* of *Troylus and Cressida*." (See V *b*, and VI.)

From this point the printers began regular quires, using the signatures ¶, ¶₂, ¶₃, ¶¶, ¶¶₂, ¶¶₃; ¶¶¶. No pagination was employed, and the title used was simply *Troylus and Cressida*.

¹ In the Sheldon and Morgan Folios this discarded sheet crept in by accident. (See IV, *a*.)

According to Mr. Fleay all of *Troilus and Cressida* had been set up in type, and a part (at least) of *Julius Cæsar* had been either set up or printed off, before the hitch came. "This space, then, of pp. 80–108,¹ which would have *just* held the *Troilus and Cressida*, being left unfilled, it became necessary to fill it. But if, as I conjecture, all the following plays from *Julius Cæsar* to *Cymbeline* were already in type, and had been printed off, there was nothing to fall back on but *Pericles* and the unfinished *Timon*. I have given reasons in my paper on *Pericles* for believing that the editors would not have considered it respectful to Shakespeare's memory to publish the *Pericles*; they therefore took the incomplete *Timon*, put it into a playwright's hands, and told him to make it up to 30 pages."²

In answer to Mr. Fleay's statement, "This space . . . would have *just* held the *Troilus and Cressida*," it is sufficient to reply that the space would have been too much by three pages. In no way could *Troilus and Cressida* be made "just" to fill the space.

Mr. Rolfe bases his theory on the same generally accepted belief, namely, that the gap, pp. 78–108, was made by the bodily removal of *Troilus and Cressida* after it had as a whole been put in type. "The latter play [*T. and C.*] had already been put in type and duly paged, and the work had gone along regularly with the *Julius Cæsar*. Perhaps, as Fleay conjectures, that and some of the following plays were in type and printed off before the gap made by transposing *Troilus and Cressida* was provided for. For that, or some other reason, the editors did not use one of the tragedies following *Julius Cæsar* to fill the gap."³ He adds: "Readers who have not the folio or one of the reprints to compare, may be puzzled to understand why the second page of *T. and C.* is numbered 79, when

¹ Not 80–108, but 78–108. The error of 80 for 78 belongs to the *second* setting of the page, not to the original *Troilus and Cressida* page.

² *New Shakspeare Society Transactions*, 1874, p. 136.

³ Stokes suggests "that none of the others would have fitted; *Macbeth* was too short, the others were too long."—*Chron. Order of Shak. Plays*, p. 134.

the first of *Timon* which is supposed to have taken its place, is numbered 80 ; but this 80 is really an error for 78, the two last pages of the preceding *R. and J.* being numbered 76 and 79. The first page of *T. and C.* was doubtless numbered correctly 78. When the play was transposed (which must have been done before it was struck off), the numbers of the pages were removed except the 79 and 80, which were accidentally left. It is proper to add that as *T. and C.* now stands in the folio, the *prologue* occupies a full page preceding the one we assume to have been numbered 78 ; but we have no doubt that the prologue, by some oversight, was not put in type until after the transposition. Unlike all other prologues it occupies a page by itself, without any heading to indicate to what play it belongs, the play beginning in the usual form, with large type heading, on the next page.”¹

The awkwardness of this explanation is apparent. It is, however, forced upon those who accept Mr. Fleay's theory.

The following reason for the removal of *Troilus and Cressida* has received wide acceptance. It is often quoted. “But as this play was originally called ‘*The History of Troilus and Cressida*’ (so in the Quarto Edition), and as there is really nothing tragical in the main bulk of it, it was doubted if it could be put with the Tragedies, so the editors of the Folio compromised the matter by putting it between the Histories and Tragedies, and not putting it at all in the Catalogue, though they still retained their first title for it as ‘*the tragedie of Troilus and Cressida.*’ ”²

But, as I have pointed out, the typographical evidence shows that only about three pages of *Troilus and Cressida* were set up in type before the hitch came. If the editors had ordered the removal of the play because they regarded it as unsuitable for the Tragedy section, the printers would probably have immediately reset the last page of *Romeo and Juliet* (only a half-page

¹ Edition of *Timon of Athens*, p. 12.

² Fleay, *New Shak. Soc. Trans.*, 1874.

of type), and have continued with *Julius Cæsar* or some other play. The trouble, however, was not at first considered of a permanent nature. The directors of the printing *seem to have expected* to continue with *Troylus and Cressida* in this original position. Consequently they shrewdly guessed how many pages *Troylus and Cressida* would occupy, and skipping the proper number of quires, began the next play with sig. kk, and pagination 109. The leaving of this gap led to all the trouble.

Mr. Lee's explanation of the irregularities is as follows:¹

"But when the first play, 'Romeo and Juliet,' reached a point near its close at the end of quire ff, the compositors fell into a confusion for which they themselves and not the furnishers of the 'copy' may be held responsible. They overlooked the four hundred and sixty-one lines that ought to follow quire ff, and began work on a new quire Gg without noticing the textual hiatus. Both the omitted portion, and the portion that followed it began with the same word 'I,' so that the catchword 'I' at the corner of the last page of quire ff did not open their eyes to their careless mistake. Luckily the omission was discovered in good time, and two separate leaves signed gg and gg₂ were interpolated to bear the overlooked lines. . . .

"But this mistake was venial compared to that which followed. In all copies the last lines of the tragedy of 'Romeo' occupy the first page of the opening leaf of quire Gg, which is numbered 79 (a typographical error for 77). On the back of the leaf Gg the printers, in accordance with their original instructions, began to set up 'Troylus and Cressida.' Three pages of the play were composed, and the second and third were numbered 79 and 80, in continuation of the correct number of the last page of 'Romeo and Juliet.' But before the composition of 'Troylus and Cressida' advanced much further a halt was called. The overseers of the press withdrew 'Troylus' from the compositors altogether, and put aside the

¹ Facsimile of the First Folio, 1902.

type already set. It may have been either that the owners of the already published quarto of 'Troilus' raised difficulties, or that it was felt incongruous to place a dramatic story of Troy after a dramatic story of mediaeval Italy. . . .

"When at length it became imperative to fill the place which the withdrawal of 'Troilus' had left vacant, 'T. of A.' was introduced. The last lines of 'Romeo' on the opening quire Gg were set up afresh with many changes of spelling, and at the back of the leaf the text of 'Timon' was begun instead of 'Troilus.' . . .

"But the difficulty was not yet fully met. There still remained unplaced the standing type of part of 'Troilus,' and the whole volume was ready for binding before the total neglect of the half-printed 'Troilus' was realized. The 'Catalogue' of contents—the list of the plays—in the preliminary pages, which was one of the last contributions to the book, was printed off without any mention of 'Troilus.' 'Coriolanus' was shown in the catalogue to begin the Tragedies section; 'Timon' to follow 'Romeo,' and 'Julius Cæsar' to follow 'Timon.' When the omission of 'Troilus' was recognized at the last minute, it was resolved to place the forgotten piece at the beginning of the Tragedies, before 'Coriolanus.' The type of the first two leaves at least was standing. The front of the first leaf bore the last lines of 'Romeo.' These were removed, and for them was substituted a hitherto unprinted prologue to 'Troilus,' which did not appear in the quarto, and was now set out in exceptionally large italic type so as to occupy the whole page. On the reverse of this first leaf the text of the play began but some changes were introduced into the old standing type, including a different ornamental headpiece. The next leaf was left in its original state, with its old page numbers (79–80), which remained to show that 'Troilus' as first printed, followed 'Romeo.' These two leaves were separate insertions, were unsigned, and formed no part of a regular quire. The fourth page of the play was begun on a new quire

of the ordinary dimensions of six leaves. It bore the signature ¶. . . .”

If, as Mr. Lee maintains, the first three pages of *Troilus and Cressida* were preserved in standing type: (1) Why were changes (of an accidental nature) introduced into page 78? (2) Why was a new ornamental headpiece substituted? (3) Why were the first two leaves printed as separate insertions, without any signatures, instead of being made a part of the first quire, or, at least, printed as a single folio? If the type was standing, the printers surely would not have made so awkward an arrangement of the play.

To sum up. A hitch came in the printing of *Troilus and Cressida* after three pages of the play had been printed as a part of quire gg. The printers expected ultimately to continue with the play; hence they left a gap, pp. 78–108, and continued with *Julius Caesar*. Before the end of the book had been reached, *Timon* was selected to fill the gap. After *Timon* had been printed (and perhaps after the Catalogue had been struck off) the managers ordered the printing of *Troilus and Cressida*. Since there was no other place for it, the play was inserted between the Histories and the Tragedies. In making these changes the printers made as much use as possible of the original quire gg, losing only one leaf. This leaf, by accident, crept into the Sheldon and Morgan folios.

If my interpretation of the irregularities is correct, the difficulty lay wholly in *Troilus and Cressida*. *Timon of Athens* was involved by mere accident: the irregularities, therefore, have no bearing on the authorship of the play.

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